

The President's Radio Address
June 30, 2001

Good morning. It's the Fourth of July this coming week, a proud day for all Americans. Two hundred and twenty-five years ago, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. That document's bold words defined our Nation and inspired the world, but words alone did not secure America's independence. In 1776 liberty had to be defended by brave soldiers and sailors at the risk of their lives, and liberty is still defended by brave men and women today.

Much has changed over the past two centuries for the people who wear the uniform of the United States. Our Armed Forces have grown into the mightiest on Earth, and their responsibilities extend all over the world. Yet, the courage and patriotism of our service men and women are as sure and as strong as ever, and we owe them the same appreciation that we feel for the soldiers of Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and Yorktown. We owe them fair salaries, first-class health benefits, and decent housing. And what we owe, we will pay.

This past week I announced an amended budget request for the Department of Defense in 2002—32.6 billion more than in 2001—to improve the training, readiness, and quality of life of our troops. This is the biggest defense increase since the Reagan buildup of the mid-1980s. For too many years, our strength has dwindled. Now we are rebuilding once again, and our first priority is the well-being of men and women in uniform. Two-thirds of our military family housing units are listed by the Department of Defense as being in poor condition. This will change.

We have other defense priorities, as well. Secretary Rumsfeld is completing a review of the mission and structure of our Armed Forces. Soon we'll be proposing a new defense strategy for a new age, a strategy that recognizes the cold war is over, but that threats to our security still remain. We are consulting with our allies, with Russia, and with others on a defense system that will protect our country, our forces, and our friends from missile attack and nuclear blackmail.

It's time for fresh thinking and rapid change in our national defense, to prepare for challenges that are changing just as quickly. One thing will never change, the quality and dedication of the men and women who wear America's uniform. They give their best; they are the best; and they deserve the best. There is no greater honor for a President than to serve as Commander in Chief, and my budget priorities reflect the pride I feel in the outstanding people who serve and protect us all.

I urge the Congress to promptly approve my defense requests, which will assure better pay, better housing, and better health care for our Armed Forces. And I wish you and your family a happy and safe Fourth of July.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 1:04 p.m. on June 29 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 30. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 29 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.